



American Citizen Service News

Happy Independence Day America!

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July 4th, 2010

The US Embassy in Damascus hosted a reception in honor of the 234th anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence at the Ambassador's residence. While the Fourth of July is a day of family picnics, patriotic gatherings and fireworks in the U.S., for an embassy its an opportunity to share the spirit of the day with representatives of the host country (Syria in this case) and other working contacts. Participation in the event can often be seen as a measure of the relationship between the U.S. and the host country. This year, over 400 guests of various nationalities came to celebrate the event with us.

After the Syrian national anthem, an embassy "barbershop quartet" sang the Star Spangled Banner in the uniquely American "barbershop quartet" style. Following the national anthems, the Chargé d'Affaires said a few words, concluding with : "The Declaration of Independence we celebrate today enshrines a belief in universal values and principles. For over 230 years people have found themselves drawn to the U.S. seeking new opportunities for life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Many Syrians have made that journey, and the fabric of American life is immeasurably richer for the bonds linking our two countries. May we only grow closer in the years ahead."



As an example of US-Syrian collaborative efforts, the Embassy used the opportunity of the Independence Day reception to display an exhibit of the archeological excavations taking place in Tell Mozan (the ancient Hurrian city of Urkesh) in northern Syria.

Fourth of July Celebrations



**The Embassy's own
Barbershop Quartet
performing the
National Anthem**



Coming to Syria—Get a Visa

The Embassy's advice to Americans planning to visit Syria has always been that "Visas must be obtained prior to arrival in Syria from a Syrian diplomatic mission located in the traveler's country of residence." In the past, tour operators had been able to assist Americans obtain entry permission at the border or at the airport. And, in some cases, individual travelers were permitted to enter Syria without having obtained a visa in advance. This appears to no longer be the case. The Embassy and Department of State are working closely with the Government of Syria to clarify current policy.

Americans arriving at the Syrian border without a visa are routinely denied entry. Some are denied entry at the airport or seaport. Others are not permitted to return after making short trips to Turkey, Jordan or Lebanon.

FVAP Marks Armed Forces and Overseas Citizens' Voters Week

The Federal Voting Assistance Program (FVAP) launched an online voter registration assistant in conjunction with Armed Forces Voters Week (AFVW) and Overseas Citizens' Voters Week (OCVW) June 28-July 7, to help more than 6 million military, their voting age dependents, and overseas voters better navigate the registration process. The new online FVAP Voter Registration Assistant helps automate a once cumbersome, manual process in advance of the mid-term elections.

The online FVAP Voter Registration Assistant guides users through voter registration, avoiding the confusion of navigating the State-by-State instructions to fill out the registration forms. Guiding voters step-by-step ensures that all information is filled out completely before moving on. At the end of the process, the assistant provides the completed form for signature and the appropriate address and delivery information for their voting district (mail, fax or email).

In 2008, FVAP asked local election officials why registration and absentee ballots were rejected. The responses indicated that the voting forms were inadequate, incomplete or mailed to the wrong jurisdiction. Since overseas voters must start the voting process earlier than their stateside friends and relatives, fewer mistakes at the outset of the process

ensures that the appropriate documentation is received and returned on time.

"You may be absent come Election Day, but you CAN be accounted for," remarked Bob Carey, FVAP Director. "Go to FVAP.gov, fill out your registration and absentee ballot application online, and send it back in July so that your election official has time to process it and send you back your absentee ballot for the November general election."



New Campaign Encourages Participation

As Armed Forces and Overseas Citizens' Voter Week gets underway, FVAP is also launching a robust marketing and communications campaign to increase voter awareness of FVAP.gov, to educate voters on the voting process, and increase voter success rates.

The communications campaign and the online Voter Registration Assistant was launched during June 28-July 7, 2010. AFVW and OCVW are coordinated efforts by the Department of

Defense and the Department of State to reach out to all military and overseas citizens. The purpose of this week was to encourage all citizens voting under the *Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act (UOCAVA)* who had not registered to vote or requested an absentee ballot this year, to do so at this time.

With the full support of the Secretary of Defense, FVAP encourages both military and Department of State Voting Assistance Officers (VAOs) to enlist the help of organizations to participate in AFVW and OCVW. Organizations such as spouse clubs, family services, Boy/Girl Scouts and other groups that support absentee voting for citizens residing outside the United States can be effective venues for holding voter registration drives, informational forums and other non-partisan activities which stress the importance of participating in the upcoming elections.

Helpful links

- Federal Voting Assistance Program: <http://www.fvap.gov/>
- National Voter Registration form: http://www.eac.gov/files/voter/nvra_update.pdf
- U.S. Election Assistance Commission: <http://www.eac.gov>
- Overseas Vote Foundation: <https://www.overseasvotefoundation.org/>

Military and Overseas Voters: Submit your Ballot Request for the July and August State Primaries!



The following States will hold Primary Elections during the summer of 2010 on the dates indicated.

July 20, 2010: Georgia

July 27, 2010: Oklahoma

August 3, 2010: Kansas, Michigan, Missouri

August 5, 2010: Tennessee

August 10, 2010: Colorado, Connecticut, Minnesota

August 17, 2010: Washington, Wyoming

August 24, 2010: Alaska, Arizona, Florida, Vermont

August 28, 2010: Louisiana (1st Party Congressional)

Register and Request Your Ballot Now!

The American Cultural Center on facebook

Many of the Americans we've spoken to in Syria have asked how they and their children can keep in touch with American culture. The Facebook page of the American Cultural Center is an easy way to keep up with embassy programs and American culture virtually! Go to <http://www.facebook.com/syria.usembassy> to catch up on the news, engage with other facebook users on current events, and update yourself on American idioms! You can also ask for and receive information from the site and view pictures from events held by the US Embassy.



The American Cultural Center on facebook is a place of interaction between those that are interested in American culture and want to learn more. Both Americans and Syrians engage in conversation on articles or questions posted by the ACC, encouraging communication and bridging cultural gaps.

Understanding Compulsory Military Service in Syria

American men of Syrian or Palestinian origin traveling to Syria may be subject to compulsory military service. It is important, therefore, to understand potential obligations and rights under Syrian law.



In many cases, dual nationals are stopped at the airport on arrival or when attempting to depart.

Syrian-American and Palestinian-American men who have never served in the Syrian military and who are planning to visit Syria are strongly urged to check with the Syrian Embassy in Washington, D.C. **prior** to traveling concerning compulsory military service.

American men over the age of 18, even those who have never resided in or visited Syria, and whose fathers are of Syrian descent, are required to complete military service or pay to be exempted. Possession of a U.S. passport does not absolve the bearer of this obligation.

As of December 16, 2009, the fee for exemption from military service has been set at \$6,500 for Syrian-American and Palestinian-American men who live abroad.

In 2008, the Syrian government reduced the mandatory military service from 24 months to 21 months.

The Embassy strongly recommends that travelers check whether they are subject to compulsory military service and pay any relevant exemption fees at the Syrian Embassy in DC *before coming to Syria.*

It also announced that Syrians born outside of Syria, and do not have a second nationality, and have resided abroad until the age of 18 have the option of being exempted from their service by paying \$500.

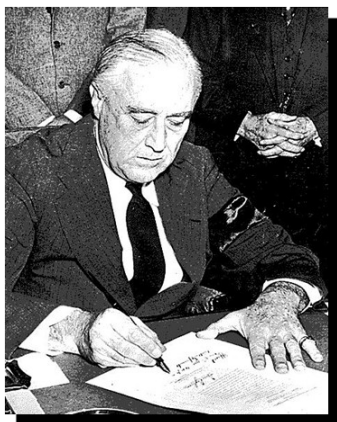
Those born in Syria who left the country before reaching the age of 11 and have resided abroad for more than 15 years can be exempted by paying \$5,000. Contact the Syrian Embassy in Washington, DC, for more information.

Exemptions after arrival in Syria are rare and may be more expensive. The Embassy strongly recommends that those who may be subject to compulsory military service check the requirements and pay any relevant exemption fees at the Syrian Embassy in DC *before coming to Syria.*

American Language Center Test Dates

<i>Test</i>	<i>July 2010</i>	<i>August 2010</i>	<i>September 2010</i>	<i>October 2010</i>	<i>November 2010</i>	<i>December 2010</i>
ITP	Tuesday, July 27	Monday, August 9 Thursday, August 26	Monday, September 13 Thursday, September 30	Thursday, October 14 Thursday, October 28	Wednesday, November 10 Tuesday, November 23	Thursday, December 9 Tuesday, December 28
GRE	N/A	N/A	N/A	Subject Test Saturday, October 9 General Test Saturday, October 23	Subject Test Saturday, November 13 General Test Saturday, November 20	N/A
SAT	N/A	N/A	N/A	Saturday, October 9	Saturday, November 6	Saturday, December 4
TOEFL	N/A	Saturday, August 14	N/A	Saturday, October 16	Saturday, November 13	N/A
TSE	No longer offered	No longer offered	No longer offered	No longer offered	No longer offered	No longer offered
TOEIC	Wednesday, July 28	Wednesday, August 25	Wednesday, September 29	Wednesday, October 27	Wednesday, November 24	Wednesday, December 29

The Selective Service System



President Franklin Roosevelt signing the Military Selective Service Act

What you need to know about whether you should register, how to register, and the consequences of not registering.

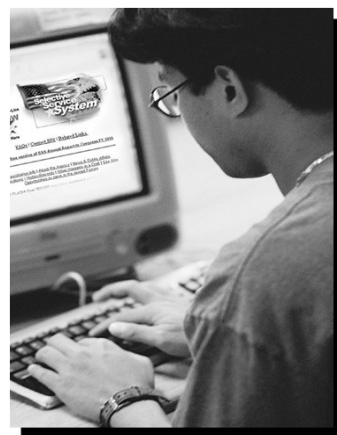
The **Selective Service System Act** was established in order to deliver manpower to the Armed Forces in times of emergency, and to administer an **Alternative Service Program** for individuals that have claimed the right to refuse to perform military service.

Who should register?

- ⇒ Male U.S. Citizens and male aliens residing in the U.S. who are between the ages of 18 and 26 are required to register.
- ⇒ Men born on or after January 1, 1960 must register with Selective Service within 30 days of their 18th birthday.

So, how can I register?

- ⇒ By initiating a registration on-line through the Agency's web site at <http://www.sss.gov>
- ⇒ By filling out a Selective Service registration form at any U.S. Post Office
- ⇒ By completing a registration reminder postcard which he may receive in the mail shortly before his 18th birthday
- ⇒ By telephone, if he receives a registration card in the mail from Selective Service with a PIN number allowing telephone registration
- ⇒ At a High School participating in Selective Service's Registrar Program
- ⇒ At any U.S. Embassy or consular office
- ⇒ By agreeing to be registered when completing a Federal student financial aid application or when applying for entry into a Federal job training program



A man registering online with Selective Service

If you do not know if you should register call 1-888-655-1825 or go to <http://www.sss.gov>.

What are the penalties of not registering?

- Men who are not registered with Selective Service may not qualify for the following:
 - Pell Grants
 - Supplemental Education Opportunity Grants
 - Federal College Work-study
 - Federal Perkins Loans
 - Federal Family Education Loans
 - Federal Direct Student Loans
- Men may also be disqualified for benefits associated with the Workforce Investment Act (WIA).
- Men who do not register may not qualify for Federal Employment.
- Many state and local governments require Selective Service compliance for employment or educational funds.
- Once you reach the age of 26, you can't register.
- If you fail to comply with the Military Selective Service act you could be prosecuted by the U.S. Department of Justice.
- Failing to register as required is a **felony**. Possible penalties include:
 - A fine of up to \$250,000
 - A prison term up to five years



The Alternative Service Program

Within the Selective Service System is the **Alternative Service Program** designed for men to fulfill their service obligation in a civilian capacity.

Conscientious Objectors. A CO is an individual who has claimed the right to refuse to perform military service on the grounds of freedom of thought, conscience, or religion.

A ministerial student. Those studying to be a priest, rabbi, or minister may be exempt from service and will be allowed to continue their education if making satisfactory progress.

A hardship case. Men whose absence would result in hardship in those who depend on them for support may be deferred from the draft.



Conscientious Objectors who performed public service during WWII in Laurel, Maryland.

Pertussis, “Whooping Cough” Outbreak in California

If you will be traveling to California this summer, please take note that the state could experience its worst pertussis, or “whooping cough”, epidemic in half a century if infections continue at the current rate, according to state health officials. Pertussis is characterized by severe coughing spells that end in a whooping sound when the person recovers and breathes in.

The state had 910 confirmed cases of pertussis as of June 15 — a fourfold increase over the same period in 2009. Health departments are looking into an additional 600 suspected cases.

Five infants under age 3 months have died from pertussis this year. Infants are not fully protected against the disease until they complete the initial series of three vaccinations by age 6 months, so the California Department of Public Health is urging birthing hospitals to vaccinate new parents before sending them home with their newborns.

The CDC is not reporting any other major pertussis outbreaks around the country, according to the New York Times, but reporting can be delayed.



American Citizen Services Hours and Contact Information

For appointments, please go to our website at :
<http://damascus.usembassy.gov/service.html>

**U.S. Embassy Damascus
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Fax: (+963-11) 331-9678
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UPCOMING HOLIDAY CLOSURES

July 29, Thursday	Section Closed
August 26, Thursday	Section Closed
September 05, Sunday	Labor Day
September 12, Sunday	Al-Fitr Holiday
September 30, Thursday	Section Closed

“Assisting approximately 4 million Americans who reside overseas and nearly 60 million who travel abroad remains a top priority for the U.S. Government.

Though consular work is punctuated by extraordinary acts to help U.S. citizens during times of crisis or urgent need, it is built upon a foundation of services provided to an American public that increasingly lives, works, and learns in the global community.”

-- Department of State and USAID Strategic Plan.